

No. 17. On the Education of the Poor.
For a Country Congregation.

Ephesians 6th, and 4th Verse.

Bring them up in the Nurture and Admonition
of the Lord.

The calamities and troubles of this life are, in every situation, so many and so perplexing, we are moved by compassion, we are constrained by duty to contribute, if we can, towards removing or lessening them. But in the lowest condition in which it has pleased God to place many of his creatures, they pierce with additional sharpness, they oppress with inconceivable weight. If then any expedient can be found by which the poor can be rendered more comfortable, the greatest service will be thereby done to society. And this expedient is in themselves. Could the indigent and necessitous be prevailed on to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, they would not only secure His favor—the greatest

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of all blessings—but they would take the readiest way to make all mankind their friends: if they would prepare their children to act their part with propriety in this life, and to lay hold of an eternal inheritance in the next, their hardships would be easier to bear; poverty, and “it is a fore evil,” would afford comforts they have not hitherto experienced; and, they would learn with resignation to the will of God, that “all things work together for good to them that love Him.”

My design, in this discourse, is to exhort you to prevent your children from the commission of some particular vices to which God knows they are naturally too prone; and then to prevail with you to bring them up, by the Blessing of God, in the observance of some virtues, and the practice of some duties which, though essential to their happiness both here and hereafter, are neglected too often alas! by a great part of the lower class of mankind.

And as there is a near relation subsisting between masters and servants, under the name of parents I

would be understood to include that of masters. For the generality of servants being very ignorant of their duty to God, and entertaining wrong notions of their duty to man, ought not their masters to instruct them in the fundamental parts of what every Christian and every man ought to know?

Now the first expression of kindness every parent ought to shew his child, I conceive, is to pray for him; to offer up his petitions at the throne of Grace, that God would adopt him for his own; that every part of his conduct might be under the direction of the Almighty; that his evil propensities might be restrained; all bad habits avoided; all his good dispositions improved; and that his whole life might be an uninterrupted series of piety towards God, and integrity towards man.

This, no doubt, is the duty of every parent to his child; I might add, of every master to his servant. If we are required "to pray one for another," it must be indispensable on those who stand in so near a relation "to pray without ceasing;" to besiege Heaven

with their requests, and to say, in the impassioned language of the Patriarch "I will not let Thee go
" until Thou hast blessed me & blessed my family also."

If Parents could be prevailed on to shew so much regard to their children, they would naturally be inclined to "preserve them from every evil way." — To proceed therefore to the vices of which children are naturally guilty—No Parent could overlook, much less make an excuse for, that odious propensity discoverable in most children, the sin of lying. When it is first discovered, from whatever motive it may have arisen, every parent ought to shew his utmost displeasure, by bestowing correction for the first known fault, and exerting the utmost care to prevent it in future. Children should be told, without passion, that it is one of those vices which will involve them in endless trouble, render them unfit for any place or employment, make every one distrust and despise them, and that, after they have dragged on a contemptible life here, they must give a strict account of every falsehood they have uttered,

and be punished with severity by Him, who has decreed, that " all liars shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."

There is another propensity which children discover, derived too often from the example of their parents, that " of taking God's name in vain." This in time becomes so familiar that it grows into a confirmed habit; so that you seldom hear them speak without hearing them at the same time irreverently, not to say, impiously, ushering in the name of God. This is a sin which calls loudly for correction. Can Parents be so unconcerned about their children as to hear them, every moment, violating an express command of God, without admonishing them for it, without shewing them the wickedness & impiety of it? Can they so little regard the welfare of their children as quietly to suffer them to incur the displeasure of God-Almighty? Ought they not to be continually repeating that the Lord himself has declared, He will not for such a transgression hold them guiltless; that is, He will severely punish them?

Taking God's name in vain is the parent of a most shocking & detestable sin, that of profane cursing and swearing. And this is a sin for which not only young but old men likewise are notoriously infamous. Not a resolution they make, not a wish they express, not an action they perform but it is accompanied with a multiplicity of oaths. What can be their meaning, or what their apology? Is it an awkward imitation of their superiors? Is it with a view of appearing sprightly, conversant with the world, or in the fashion? Alas! whatever be the design, the guilt is the same! Let every parent, every master of a family seriously consider the declaration of God by His Prophet—"a curse," saith God, "a curse shall enter into the house of every one that sweareth by my name and shall consume it."

Profaning the Lord's-Day is another sin to which young people are naturally addicted. Every Sunday that passes over our heads verifies this assertion. The villages, the lanes, the fields are crowded

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with young people and children; but the house of God
is almost deserted by them. One would imagine they
are never required to go to Church; that they are never
taught it is their duty to worship God in His own house;
but, on the contrary, that they are encouraged to spend
the Lord's Day in idleness, or in diversions and
amusements. The parents themselves, not attending
Church so regularly as they ought, can easily find ex-
cuses for their children's neglect. They are confined,
they alledge, all the week, and therefore it would be
very hard if they might not have, on that day, a lit-
tle relaxation. But do you find any license in the scrip-
tures allowing your children to spend the Lord's Day as
they please? Has God pledged himself to forgive the
poor for profaning His holy day? If it be necessary
to bring up your children in working six days of the
week; is it not equally necessary that, on the seventh
day, they should be brought up in the knowledge of
God? And what way is there of teaching them the
principles of Christianity, if you do not require them

to attend public worship? Those who are not accustomed in their infancy to go to church, are very often negligent about it all their lives: those, on the contrary, who are brought up in the practice of worshipping God on the Sunday in the congregation, never feel easy when they are hindered from partaking of that divine employment.

The Church is the place to which they should be obliged regularly to go; and they should be taught, when they are there, to behave properly, as fallen creatures supplicating salvation of their Almighty Creator.

Another vice from which young people should be carefully restrained is that of drunkenness.—They should be made acquainted how it disqualifies them from getting their livelihood—how afraid every one justly is of admitting Drunkards into their families—how it leads them insensibly to the commission of every vice; to defraud, to steal, to rob in order to supply them with the means of this fa-

tal indulgence; and lastly, that Drunkards are in the number of those who shall not be received into the kingdom of heaven.

By preserving young people from those vices they will be brought up, in part, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; but in order to excite them to endeavor to arrive at a high degree of virtue, it is incumbent on parents and masters of families to instruct them in the practice of some amiable and essential virtues.

And the first I shall mention is that of Civility. There are many children so rude & uncivilized, that, were it not for their shape and power of speech, we might conclude to be brutes rather than human creatures. Such children, when they become men, deserve no other title than that of Barbarians. The fullness, ill-temper, and moroseness they discover throughout their whole conduct render their lives uneasy to themselves and to all their neighbors; and to every one with whom they are connected they are disagreeable

and offensive. What was said of Naboth is applicable to too many, " he is such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him." Civility and Respect are strongly enforced by the sacred writers: " Be courteous; Have a good report of them that are without; Give no offence in any thing; Let every one please his neighbour for his good to edification."

Another virtue which ought early to be impressed on childrens minds, is honesty. The universal suspicion and abhorrence in which an unjust person is held, the fear of employing him, the danger of depending on him, place him in so detestable a light, one might hope parents would guard their children against this detestable vice, against this heinous sin, above all others. We observe, however, many of the poor pursuing a very different line of conduct. We see them take any thing on which they can lie their hands from those who are in a superior station, and even recommending it to their children to do the same. What is this but bringing them up to destruction? What is it but preparing

them for punishment here and eternal punishment hereafter?

Under Injustice I comprehend the taking an unfair advantage. You should teach them to do to others exactly as they would wish to be done by—not to impose upon any one because he does not understand the full value of what he is selling or going to purchase—not to make use of false weights and measures when they may have to escape being found out. Inculcate strongly upon their minds that "the Lord is the avenger of all such."

That these principles may be, with more efficacy, impressed, give them an early tincture of Religion. Teach them that, by the transgressions of our first parents, "sin entered into the world, and by sin, death, " and so passed upon all men who had not actually "sinned." "But as we died in Adam," teach them how "we live by Christ." Teach them that He who was "very God of very God" took upon Him our nature, and made satisfaction for us; and that, hav-

ing wrought out our salvation, He assists us by His Spirit in the discharge of our duty; that, when we fall into sin, He encourages us to repent; and, that, when we do well, He sheds upon us the influences of His heavenly comforts. After having taught them these saving doctrines, you will naturally teach them to offer up their Prayers devoutly and constantly to Almighty God. And one essential part of your duty, if you wish your children and Servants well, you will never neglect, I mean, family worship. Every Evening you can assemble your family; you will make use of such prayers as are best suited to your wants & capacities; and, by having a stated time for this service, your children and all under your roof will be preserved from bad company; they will be brought up in a habit of Religion; they will soon feel a sensible pleasure in offering up their prayers and praises, and all their actions will be regulated by the dread of offending, by the desire of pleasing God.

The last duty I shall mention as incumbent on

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parents and masters of families in bringing up their children and household in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, is the constant and regular celebration of the Lord's-Supper. Now as this is not to be done till after they have arrived at the age of manhood, and as, at this period of their lives, children are not always with their parents, it becomes the more immediate duty of their masters. The end of its Institution, the consequent necessity of receiving it, the benefits derived from it ought all to be strongly inculcated; and, if they are taught and prevailed on to receive it worthily, the immediate advantages you yourselves will obtain will amply repay you for the kindness of your advice and the exertion of your authority; and, after having brought them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, you will have the satisfaction of seeing them happy here, and the well-grounded hope of being for ever happy with them hereafter.

Nothing now remains but that I earnestly exhort you, both parents & masters, to inculcate by pre-

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cept and enforce by example, the necessity & the happiness of a religious life.

To speak of the undutifulness of children—the inextricable difficulties they have brought on themselves—the shame and grief in which they have plunged their distracted parents may rend the hearts of those who are now reaping the sad harvest of all their misapplied indulgence, the bitter vintage of their wilful blindness—their children's ruin. You, who are parents, on you it is incumbent, however low may be your situation, mean your capacity, uninspiring your mind, to teach your children the end of theirs & of all existence. As you are the authors of their being, & have given them life, ought you not to qualify them, as far as it is in your power, for the true enjoyment of it? For, on whom can they depend for instruction, but on you? And if they hear you take God's name in vain; if they observe you neglect the church; if they discover you defrauding others; if they see you intoxicated with liquor; if you never assemble your family

to ask for what you are in need; if you do not enjoin them to offer up prayers for themselves; if they never know you attend the Sacrament; you cannot expect, you cannot desire that they should either be good in this world or happy in the next. And may you not with reason apprehend Almighty God will address Himself to you as He did to His servant Eli? "For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." God forbid! that your children should step one foot in the path of destruction, & you not instantly endeavor to pluck it out!

You will be pleased to consider—I address myself to all heads of families—how ignorant and uncultivated your servants generally are; how little they know, how much they have to learn; and that if you are not kind enough, not only to give them opportunities of learning their duty, but also to superintend them and see that they do learn it, their ignorance may be their ruin.

Let me persuade you then, my Brethren, to endeavor from this day to impress upon their minds a serious thought about their eternal salvation. You yourselves will be more than proportionably repaid; they will make your interest theirs; you will no longer need to keep a constant watch over them; you will always find them sober, diligent, quiet, and honest.—

Let me prevail with you to shew, nay to go before them in the way to Heaven. Let them not learn from your example to profane the hallowed name of God, to break his sabbaths, to despise His ordinances; but let them rather learn civility and kindness; to "pray one for another;" to delight in uniting with your family your common petitions for your common wants; to attend public worship, and above all, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; then will you have complied with the precept of the Apostle, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and be, under God, the blessed instruments of their immortal Happiness.

Theophilus J. St. John

Entered at Stationers' Hall.

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